A Comprehensive Analytical Research Paper on the Ancient Era, Epigraphy, and Financial Geography of the Arakkha Region (Sandra Land)

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Abstract

This research paper presents a multi-disciplinary analysis of the historic geography, monetary systems, and lithic inscriptions of the Arakkha region (Sandra Land) along the northern coast of the Bay of Bengal. It explores the existence of "Argyre" (Land of Silver) in Greek-Roman cartography, the flow of the Yunnan-Rakhine-India silver trade route via the Southwestern Silk Road, and the "Proto-Digital DNA" of coinage featuring the Nandi and Srivatsa symbols of the Wethali Candra dynasty. Additionally, the paper analyzes the scholarly data from the Shitthaung Pillar (Anandacandra Inscription) and provides a new interpretation of the "Sandra" logo, which depicts the crescent-shaped Rakhine coastline and the four major rivers (Naf, Mayu, Kaladan, and Lemro). Finally, it proposes a roadmap for the digital preservation of regional cultural heritage and a proposal for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

1. Introduction

The Arakkha region (or Sandra Land), located along the northern coast of the Bay of Bengal, was a hub for Indian Ocean maritime trade in ancient times, yet it remains an area with limited comprehensive analysis. This alluvial coastal corridor, stretching approximately 160 miles, is bordered by the sea to the west and the Rakhine Yoma mountain range to the east, which physically separates it from the Irrawaddy river basin in Central Myanmar. This unique geography oriented the Rakhine region toward the open sea, transforming it into a "Frontier of Exchange" that connected directly to the Ganges Delta, Yunnan (China), the Malay Peninsula, and the western Indian Ocean. By integrating the historic geography, monetary systems, and inscriptions of the Sandra region, one can clearly see its pivotal role in the world's early globalization process.

2. Greek-Roman Cartography and the Evolution of "Argyre" (Land of Silver)

The earliest Western records regarding the Rakhine region evolved from mythical descriptions to precise mathematical cartography. Early maps based on the findings of Eratosthenes (c. 276-194 BCE) depicted an unnamed southern coastal region adjacent to the Ganges Delta, protected by mountain ranges. Later, Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE - 24 CE) maintained this depiction but left the interior of Rakhine as an uncharted void.

In 1st-century literature, the region was referred to as the legendary "Argyre" (Land of Silver or Silver Island), adjacent to "Chryse" (Golden Land). Pomponius Mela (c. 43-44 CE) systematically recorded this in *De Chorographia*, and Pliny the Elder (c. 77 CE) confirmed that despite skepticism regarding the existence of literal gold and silver soil, the region was immensely rich in mineral resources. These records persisted through the Middle Ages via the encyclopedias of Solinus and Isidore of Seville, remaining influential until the Age of Discovery.

Table: Era & Scholar / Cartographic Notation & Evolution / Geographical Implication

- **Eratosthenes (c. 276-194 BCE)**: Unnamed coastal strip and mountains near the Ganges Delta. / Earliest coastal outline; interior left blank.
- **Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE - 24 CE)**: Copied Eratosthenes' map; interior remained blank. / Area identified but no population/urban data.
- **Pomponius Mela (c. 43-44 CE)**: Identified "Argyre" (Silver Land) adjacent to "Chryse" (Gold). / Initial classification as a resource-rich region based on legends.
- **Pliny the Elder (c. 77 CE)**: Skeptical of literal gold/silver soil but confirmed mineral wealth. / Economic analysis of extractable precious metals.
- **Claudius Ptolemy (c. 150 CE)**: Used latitude/longitude lines; depicted Sada port and Sados River. / First precise geographical location identified via mathematical cartography.

In the 2nd century, Claudius Ptolemy (c. 150 CE) utilized records from South Indian travelers and Western merchants to create accurate maps. He identified the region from the Naaf River to Cape Negrais as "Argyre," noting the port of Sada (thought to be Thandwe or the Kaladan river mouth) and the Sados River (Kaladan River system) as significant locations.

3. Linguistic Evolution of "Arakan" and "Rakhine"

The nomenclature of the Rakhine region has undergone various transformations influenced by different languages.

- **Early Period**: Yakkhapura / Rakkhapura (Sanskrit/Pali) - Indigenous people perceived as ogres by Indian missionaries.

- **Early Trade Era**: Arrakan / Aragu (Tamil/Kannada) - Combination of tribal name and the valuable shellac traded with South India.
- **2nd Century CE**: Argyre (Greek: Claudius Ptolemy) - Mapped as "Silver Land" based on "Arrakan".
- **11th Century CE**: Arekadesa (Sanskrit - Anandacandra Inscription) - Means "Land of the Arika"; refers to aristocratic rule.
- **12th-15th Centuries**: Rakhuin / Rakhaing (Old Burmese) - Official name used during contact with Central Myanmar dynasties.
- **9th Century CE**: Al-Rakhang / Rahan (Arab/Persian) - Name used by Arab traders for the eastern Bay of Bengal.
- **15th Century**: Rachani (Latin) - First Latin-based transcription by European travelers.
- **16th-17th Centuries**: Rakanj / Arkhang / Aracan (Turkish, Mughal, Portuguese, English) - Emergence of the modern "Arakan" name through colonial maritime powers.

4. The Sandra Logo and Symbolism

"Sandra Land" (or the Sandra region) directly refers to the ancient Candra dynasty, which established sovereignty along the Kaladan and Lemro river basins.

1. **Crescent Moon (Crescent Coast):** Represents the unique geographic shape of the Rakhine coastline.
1. **Four Dots (Four Rivers):** Represents the four lifeblood rivers that supported the region's culture, agriculture, and maritime trade: the Naf, Mayu, Kaladan, and Lemro.

5. The Southwestern Silk Road and the Silver Trade

Defining the Rakhine region as "Argyre" (Land of Silver) was not merely poetic; it was due to it being a major maritime outlet for the "Southwestern Silk Road" (or *Dianmianyin Gudao*) connecting Sichuan/Yunnan (China), Northern Myanmar, and Eastern India/Bangladesh.

The Bawdwin mine in Northern Shan State was one of the largest metal deposits in the world. Silver from this mine was transported across the Rakhine Yoma to the Ganges Delta and Rakhine coastal ports, minted into high-quality coins, and circulated throughout the Bay of Bengal economic zone.

6. Hydrology, Sedimentation, and Urban Evolution

The history of Rakhine urban centers is tied to the environment of the Kaladan and Lemro basins.

- **Dhanyawadi:** "Land rich in grain harvest," capital from the mid-4th to 6th century.
- **Wethali:** "Country with abundant harvests," capital from the 8th to 12th century.

Both cities utilized advanced hydraulic engineering to manage flooding and water storage, but eventually, heavy sedimentation and river course changes caused these ports to lose their access to the sea, leading to the shift toward the interior "Four-city period" (Launggyet, etc.) in the 15th century.

7. The Anandacandra Inscription and Epigraphic Findings

The most significant evidence of the ancient Sandra era is the "Anandacandra Inscription" (Shitthaung Pillar), erected around 729 CE by King Anandacandra. It is a 12-foot tall square sandstone pillar, originally part of a ceremonial *Torana* gateway, later moved to Shitthaung Temple by King Min Bin (r. 1531-1553).

- **Eastern Face:** Late Northern Brahmi script (6th century).
- **Western Face:** Proto-Nagari script (c. 720 CE), recording three dynasties that ruled for over a thousand years.
- **Northern Face:** Siddhamatrika/Gaudi script (11th century), recording later dynasties.

8. Early Buddhism and "Ye Dhamma" Inscriptions

The Sandra region was an early center of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Over 50 "Ye Dhamma Hetuppabhava" inscriptions (the essence of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) have been discovered in the region, written in scripts ranging from Gupta to early Bengali. Both Mahayana and Theravada traditions flourished here.

9. Coinage and the Candra Dynasty ("Proto-Digital DNA")

The Candra dynasty established an official sovereign coinage system nearly a thousand years before the Pagan Empire.

- **Obverse:** Nandi (bull), symbol of Shiva/Sovereignty.
- **Reverse:** Srivatsa (auspicious symbol of prosperity/Sri-Lakshmi).

These coins functioned as "Proto-Digital DNA" because the combination of symbols, dots, and lines acted as metadata, allowing merchants to immediately verify weight, purity, and mint origin.

10. Chittagong Governors and Trilingual Coins

In the late Mrauk-U period (15th-17th century), the kingdom extended into Chittagong. To manage this diverse borderland, Mrauk-U kings appointed *Myosas* (governors) who issued coins using Tanka standards, often with trilingual inscriptions (Rakhine, Persian, Bengali/Arabic) to assert authority over diverse populations.

11. UNESCO World Heritage Roadmap

The Green Nova Brother Organization (GNBO) proposes a three-step roadmap for UNESCO inclusion:

1. **Scientific Evidence & Digital Preservation:** Use remote sensing, GIS mapping, and EDXRF analysis on coins to document history scientifically.
1. **Community Engagement:** Education and local participation to prevent illicit excavation and promote sustainable economic development.
1. **UNESCO Nomination:** Proposing the region as a "Transboundary serial property" linking Rakhine historical sites with ancient ports in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

This research paper confirms that the Sandra region was a central hub in early globalization, fueled by the Southwestern Silk Road and a sophisticated monetary system. The preservation of this invaluable heritage is the responsibility of GNBO and the entire community.

May the memory of our ancestors—their prosperous cities, their history, their architecture, and their sovereignty—be known to the world.

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